
Preface

In October, 1997 I dispensed a binaural set of in-the-canal hearing aids to a patient who was a friend of the Dean of the Medical School and also happened to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Medical School. It was a situation such as this that must have precipitated Billy Joel to write the song *Pressure!* At our three-week follow-up, he expressed satisfaction with the performance of the hearing aids and the benefit scores on the APHAB supported his comments. About a month after the fitting he went to Florida for a meeting. From Florida he called to inform me that there was a “frying” sound arising from the hearing aids. My immediate reaction was that the “frying” was a result of excessive moisture due to the increased humidity in Florida. I counseled him on this possibility and advised him to look in the local phone book to find an audiologist and purchase a dri-aid kit. He thanked me for the advice and said he would call if the problem persisted. A few days later he called with the same complaint, but reported that he would be back in St. Louis in a couple of days and would drop by the office. When he arrived I listened to the hearing aids. Sure enough there was a low-level “frying” noise. To me, the level of the noise was so soft that it was almost unnoticeable. However, to the patient the noise was extremely annoying.

I sent the hearing aids in for repair and called the patient when they arrived. He picked up the hearing aids and about two days later he called with the same complaint. Once again I sent the hearing aids in for repair. The patient picked up the hearing aids and once again he returned in two or three days with the same complaint. At this point, I returned the hearing aids to the manufacturer and ordered a different set of hearing aids from another manufacturer. The problem has not occurred with the new set (at least for the time being).

The events in the previous paragraph point out a situation that can arise from problems associated with noise and distortion generated by hearing aids. If your patients have described the amplified sound as “frying”, “blurry”, “fuzzy”, “tinny”, “harsh”, “shrill”, “grating”, or “raspy”, it may well be that your patient is saying that the sound produced by the hearing aids is distorted and unacceptable. This issue of *Trends* provides a comprehensive overview of why distortion occurs and describes the numerous types of distortion, how distortion is measured, how the patient may perceive distortion, and how to minimize or prevent distortion.

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